

LITHUANIA HONORS A HOLOCAUST RESCUER

from *Points East* - a publication of the Sino-Judaic Institute, California

In the summer of 1940, in the Lithuanian capital city of Kovno (Kaunas), a Dutch gentile businessman did truly amazing things to assist literally thousands of stranded Jews. What was the role of Jan Zwartendijk (1896-1976) in the Kovno rescue episode? Why has Lithuania now recognized him for courage fifty-nine years after the event?

The Kovno Episode

By late 1939, under the terms of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, Germany had completed its occupation of western Poland while the Soviet Union took over eastern Poland. By May 1940 at least 10,000 Jews had fled from those occupied zones into neutral Lithuania. On June 15, 1940 the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania and five weeks later accepted its "request" to be annexed into the U.S.S.R., a procedure that was completed by August 5.

The Polish Jews who had fled to Lithuania precisely to escape Soviet rule felt especially vulnerable and desperate during the annexation process. By July virtually all consulates in Kovno, the Lithuanian capital, were in the process of closing. Panic set in among the Jewish refugees. At the point Jan Zwartendijk, voluntarily and at great personal risk, took on a role which quickly evolved into the rescue of the Jews.

Since May 1939 Jan had represented Philips, the Dutch electronics manufacturer, in Lithuania. In May 1940 the Germans over-ran Holland and a Dutch Government-in-Exile, technically a resistance organization, was established in London. L.P.J. De Decker, the Dutch Ambassador to the Baltic states who was based in Riga, Latvia, suspected the then-Dutch consul in Kovno of pro-Nazi sympathies. In June 1940 he asked Zwartendijk to take over in Kovno as consul in Lithuania representing the Dutch Government-in-Exile. In spite of the fact that Zwartendijk had no diplomatic experience and a wife and three young children in Kovno, he readily accepted this potentially risky assignment.

Zwartendijk's work almost immediately entailed the even more dangerous task of rescuing Jews. In July 1940 Pessla Lewin, a former Dutch

citizen who was now a Polish refugee living in Lithuania with her husband Isaac and son Nathan, took the gamble of writing to De Decker, who was still the Dutch ambassador. She requested authorization to emigrate to the Dutch West Indies. She learned that no visa was required but that she would need a landing permit from the local governor. Such permits were only rarely issued. Nevertheless the ambassador tried to help by inscribing in her Polish passport, in French, the statement that "for the admission of aliens to Surinam, Curaçao, and other Dutch possessions in the Americas, an entry visa is not required." This stipulation, dated July 11 1940, came to be known as a "Curaçao visa." It gave the impression of being as good as a visa since it omitted the key phrase that a landing permit was required. On July 22, Isaac Lewin approached Zwartendijk in Kovno. According to Lewin, Zwartendijk, "after seeing what De Decker had done, copied (the Curaçao visa) into my Lithuanian safe-conduct pass." Armed with this documentation, Pessla and Isaac Lewin, plus her mother and brother who were still Dutch citizens, went to the Soviet and Japanese consuls in Kovno and were routinely issued seven-to-fifteen-day transit visas allowing them to pass through each of those countries. The Japanese consul was Sugihara Chiune, who has been featured in movies and is far better known than Zwartendijk. Without Zwartendijk's fictitious destination visas, however, neither Sugihara nor his Soviet counterpart would have been able to issue one single transit visa through their respective territories.

Unaware of the Lewins' experience, Nathan Gutwirth, a legitimate Dutch citizen then residing in Telz (Telsiai), Lithuania, asked Zwartendijk on July 24 if several of his fellow students, non-Dutch citizens, could accompany him to Curaçao. Zwartendijk volunteered to help, providing the same notation he had given the Lewin's. Gutwirth conveyed this information to Polish Zionist leader, and later Israeli Minister of Religious Affairs, Zorach Warhaftig. Warhaftig made inquiry of Zwartendijk, who let it be known that he was willing to give a "Curaçao visa" to anyone who asked.

Thus, with Zwartendijk's help, the Lewin's single-family trip rapidly became a mass exodus of beleaguered Jews. Within hours, dozens of petitioners were lined up at Zwartendijk's Philips office, which is today part of the Red

Cross hospital on Kovno's main downtown thoroughfare. Zwartendijk originally had received De Decker's concurrence to issue phoney visas only for a few of Gutwirth's friends. But Zwartendijk went on to write approximately 1,300 visas by hand between July 24 and 27 and another 1,050 with the help of a rubber stamp between July 29 and August 3, when the Soviets took over Zwartendijk's office, obligating him and his family to return to Holland. The highest known visa number is 2,345, issued to Elisasz Kupinski and his family.

In reality, not a single Jew showed up in Curaçao. This is not surprising because Zwartendijk had made it clear to the recipients of his "Curaçao visas" that this notation would not allow them entry. They understood very well that the "Curaçao visas" were a ruse to get out of the U.S.S.R. and, they hoped, as far as Japan, where they could try their luck at various consulates to get visas for other countries. About half of the roughly 2,200 refugees who reached Japan with Zwartendijk's visas succeeded in moving on to the United States, Palestine, and other final destinations. Those not so fortunate were shipped by the Japanese government to Shanghai, the only place on earth just prior to the Holocaust where a Jew, or anyone else, could legally walk ashore without any documentation whatsoever. Within a year of the Kovno exodus Lithuania was over-run by the Nazis. The remaining Jews of Lithuania were almost entirely annihilated. The thousands of Jews who escaped with the help of visas from Zwartendijk would almost certainly have been murdered had they remained in Lithuania.

On June 4, 1999, on the grounds of the Jewish State Museum in Vilna (Vilnius), the present-day capital of Lithuania, three stone monuments were dedicated in his memory by Lithuania.

I would like to trace a friend of mine from Frank Iny School, Baghdad. His name is Safaa Nadhim Dabbi, 48, and I heard that he is living in Israel. I have not seen him in over thirty years and would appreciate any suggestions you might have that could eventually lead to making contact with him.

Thanking you in anticipation.

E-mail Sabah Ezra Sami Zilouf (Simon)
Simon Zilouf<szilouf@hotmail.com>

HOLOCAUST IGNORES GREEK JEWRY

Sir, There are numerous aspects of the Holocaust to which attention should be drawn to appreciate its disastrous consequences. One such is the extermination of Sephardi Jews mainly from Greece and other places in the Balkans.

The six million Jewish martyrs include over 60,000 Jews of Sephardi origin, mainly in the Balkans, though many were from Holland. Most of the former were transported from Greece to Auschwitz in 1943.

Out of 70,000 Jews in Greece before the Second World War only 10,000 survived. These numbers are small but still significant compared to those from elsewhere in Europe.

The courageous Greek Orthodox Archbishop, Damaskinos of Athens, wrote a public letter to the Greek Prime Minister at the time signed by many other public figures stating: "The Greek People were rightly surprised and grieved to learn that the German Occupation authorities have already started to deport the Greek Jewish community of Salonika to Poland.

"Greek Jews have proven to be valuable contributors to Greek economy and have had their full share in the common sacrifice of Greece to defend its inalienable historical rights... all the children of common mother Greece are an inseparable unity and we demand that the government protest against the deportation of Greek Jews which insults our nation's honour and unity."

The notorious ex-Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, in a book by Zvi Elpeleg was quoted as saying, "Kill the Jews wherever you find them - this pleases Allah, history and religion." He recruited Muslim Nazi troops in Bosnia to help Rommel rid the Holy Land of Jews. In November 1941 he was photographed with Hitler urging him to carry out the extermination of the Jews - before the Wansee "Final Solution" conference of January 1942. On December 15 1942 Winston Churchill said in the House of Commons special session: We will pursue the Nazi criminals to the ends of the earth." As not enough was done, other mass murderers did their evil work after the war.

Percy Gourgey
Sephardi member, Yad Vashem
Committee of Board of Deputies
Twickenham

I have been an avid reader of *The Scribe* for the past 29 years, ever since my father Abraham Sassoon Mukamal received your first issue of this wonderful magazine. My Father as well as all of his children and his brothers and sisters were born in Baghdad and proud to be identified as Iraqi Jews. My brother Steven and I have established a website on the internet: **www.mukamal.com** which now includes more than 900 family members dating back to the early 1700's. Some family lineage is most complete while other members dating prior to the turn of the past century are very skimpy in data. This is due primarily to the fact that old age has taken a toll on these patriarchs who never passed down in written form where they came from.

This website includes the spouses and their family of the patriarchs' Abraham Mukamal, a Sassoon Murad and Abdunabi Chitayat. My brother and I are happy for what we have accomplished so far with identifying as many family members as possible, BUT there are so many more family members that are not included. Also, this website: **www.mukamal.com** was envisioned as a living family tree of the original Mukamal, a Sassoon Murad and Chitayat patriarchs'. One that could be updated as new members are added and the departed are recognised. I need the help of *The Scribe* and *The Scribe* web page **www.thescribe.uk.com** to spread the word that **www.mukamal.com** exists and that any corrections, changes and/or additions to a family such as a birth, death or special event or occasion. Please e-mail me at **dmukamal@home.com** I will be more than happy to include any needed changes to the family tree. I speak for my brother and my immediate family of uncles, aunts and cousins who are proud of where they or their parents came from. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share the introduction of the website: **www.mukamal.com** with all *The Scribe* readership.

**London David Samier Mukamal,
Son of Abraham Sassoon Mukamal**

Scribe: One has to be very careful when going back more than 200-250 years.

Knowledge is power

The greater our knowledge, the greater our influence on others.

COOKERY CORNER:

Danish Rum Cream

from: Joyce Rose

5 egg yolks
4 oz sifted icing sugar
1/4pt rum
1 tblsp kosher gelatine
2 tblsp water
1 pint double cream, whipped
5 egg whites, stiffly beaten
Raspberry sauce

Beat egg yolks with sifted icing sugar and stir in rum. Dissolve gelatine in water in a bowl over hot water. Stir into rum mixture until well combined. Fold in the cream, reserving a little for decoration, and the egg whites. Pour into a glass bowl and chill for at least three hours. Decorate with rosettes of whipped cream forced through a pastry tube and serve with raspberry sauce. Serves 6-8.

Raspberry sauce: push one small can of raspberries through a sieve. Bring to the boil with syrup from the can.

At last I have been browsing through your website and was thrilled and amazed at all that I found regarding photos and the contents of the current issue of *The Scribe*. Internet is really a wonderful thing giving the possibility of reading all the wealth of information and subjects interesting me. I wish to compliment you, Naim, and thank you for all you have invested in this website. My only wish is if it were possible to add to the photos - David and Ide of New York with family, and an old photo of good times of Salim and Ruth of Stockholm. Blessed be Salim's memory.

Yes, it is Ruth's sister writing to you - with best wishes to you, Naim and Renée, for good health and happiness in the coming year 5761. Shana Tova!

Bat-Yam, Israel

E-mail from Judy Dattner

I thank you for telling my life story in "*The Scribe*" (No. 72, P. 38). I must say it was beautifully presented and I am proud to have a presence in the Sephardi community, which I love and admire.

London

Freddie Knoller

The following is an interesting correspondence between Maurice Sasson Peress and Rabbi Howard Joseph of the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue of Montreal which should be of interest to Sephardim everywhere.

26 September 1999

Dear Rabbi

We have been enjoying a period of peace and harmony under the leadership of our President, Mr Selim Moghrabi. Prior to embarking on a step towards modernisation, we should take a long breathe and consider the consequences. President Moghrabi, in his address Yom Kippur emphasised the fact that our Synagogue needs a man, a strong man, a hard-working man to succeed him as President. In stressing the issue, Mr Moghrabi was trying to avoid playing into the hands of the Maghen Abraham's' faction who have been advocating the separation of their services from the Spanish (in order to have the possibility of a lady President). Electing a lady President will no doubt weaken the position of the members who prefer to stay at the Spanish. If Maghen Abraham decide to part away, a minimum of fifty families, Iraqis and Moroccans will join them. The tax base of our Synagogue will be diluted, the beautiful Chapel towards Mr Joe Iny and his brother generously contributed will be vacant. Victor Mashaal is dreaming in Technicolour when he says one member leaves and 699 will stay. Fact is he will no longer be able to carry the flag unless he coughs amounts commensurate with the honour bestowed on his beloved. All we ask you to do, our dear Rabbi, is to respect our Sephardi traditions and be a stabilising factor in keeping us together.

Maurice S Peress

5 October 1999

Dear Maurice

Your recent letters provide me with the opportunity to offer my views as to the nature of Orthodoxy and the basis of unity in our Congregation. Other matters will be clarified if we can come to an understanding about these two fundamental issues.

An Orthodox synagogue is one in which the rule of Halakhic law and tradition is supreme and is interpreted and applied by an ordained rabbi who is trained to interpret and apply the legal tradition to contemporary issues.

This fundamental consideration

is very different from non-Orthodox congregations wherein the members often decide on their own what should or should not be done without reference to Halakhic procedure. In some cases they may give much weight to Halakhah but are also influenced by what they call History and Tradition (Conservative) or disregard Halakhah completely in favour of what is convenient or comfortable (Reform).

But again, Orthodoxy has staked its emphasis and commitment to the Jewish legal tradition as the Word of G-d that must be obeyed. Orthodox Jews submit their questions to their rabbi and submit to his decisions.

If we are going to have an Orthodox congregation then we are all going to work for this principle and realise that the rabbi has a key role to play. Neither Maurice Peress, Victor Mashaal, Selim Moghrabi, Emile Fattal, David Kauffman or David Gabbay have the expert knowledge required to render Halakhic judgements. I do not know of anyone else in the congregation who does. If anyone of these or other members wishes to serve in an administrative capacity they can so be chosen by the members. But they cannot function as replacements for the rabbi and pronounce on what is or is not halakhically valid course of behaviour.

Furthermore, our congregation is constituted of members who identify with Orthodoxy and who may wish congregation affairs to be guided by Orthodox policies but they themselves are not completely observant in an Orthodox fashion. We call these kinds of people today the 'non-observant Orthodox'.

In some Orthodox synagogues none of the above type persons would be welcome to serve in any official capacity. In others they would not even be offered to go to the Torah for an Aliyah. Their lack of complete observance would disqualify them. In these congregations the members readily submit to the decisions of the Rabbi.

There are other factors in Jewish identity. These may include an attachment to community, past and present; nostalgia for a lost community or family traditions; attachment to Israel and charitable concern for Jews everywhere. However, for Orthodoxy the primary commitment is the observance of G-d's commandments in the Torah as implemented in the Halakhah.

So, nostalgia may be important but it is not enough to go on. If one or

another group insists on its nostalgic vision to be implemented then there will be no room for other groups in our Synagogue. Halakhah does not work only on what was done in the past; it must decide for the present. Orthodox Jews ask their rabbis if heart transplants and in-vitro fertilisation techniques are permissible. The fact that one hundred or five hundred or one thousand years ago they were not done does not mean that they are forbidden. These questions are decided upon using the components of Jewish law from the Babylonian Talmud and subsequent codes and commentaries that relate to these questions. They are interpreted and applied. Sometimes a consensus of rabbis is reached and, sometimes, differing perspectives remain.

If we wish to create unity in our congregation it must be on this fundamental. If we wish to move to a stricter interpretation of Orthodoxy as noted above we can discuss this. However, it is improper to conduct these discussions without the Rabbi present. Otherwise the sources of Torah are absent and the discussion is no longer one based on Torah and for the sake of heaven.

On the question of whether or not a woman can be President of a synagogue both Hazzan Abbitan and myself agree that there is no Halakhic objection. An Iraqi rabbi, the late Rabbi Hayyim David Halevi who served as Chief Rabbi for many years, wrote that in voluntary situations people can give authority to a woman to be a judge in a religious court for civil matters, for example.

We also have the precedent of Golda Meir. Orthodox rabbis served in her cabinet and I do not recall any objection to her being chosen as a leader of a Jewish community. In 18th century Kurdistan, Asnat Barzani, a scholarly woman, succeeded her husband as head of a Yeshivah.

Finally, we have the example of Deborah, the Biblical prophet, judge and leader who ruled our nation over 3000 years ago.

So in my mind there is no religious Halakhic issue here. If there are other issues to be discussed in this matter then they should be brought forth but not under the cover of religion. Religiously I do not see any issue.

I know that some people are uncomfortable with the more elevated opportunities women have in Canada and other Western countries. But this is the

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reality. If we deny women valid opportunities in our communities we will lose the respect of our women for Judaism. This would be the end of our tradition for they would not teach their children about something that denies their dignity.

I hope that all those who wish to see our congregation continue in the ways of Orthodox Judaism will rally around the proper comprehension of this term and not use it so selectively promote their own special interests. I hope to continue to be able to have the opportunities to teach and explain to our members how an active, serious and devoted Jewish life can enrich their lives. I hope we can all work together to promote the observance of Shabbat, the dietary laws, regular attendance at the Synagogue all year long and all the other beautiful obligations by which Jews have lived for thousands of years but which now appear to be distant to many of our members. We would then be approaching the ideals of an Orthodox synagogue.

Rabbi Howard S Joseph

Scribe:

1) The occupational differences between men and women has been narrowing gradually since the French Revolution two centuries ago, even more so in the past 50 years of relative international peace.

However, even if the difference is now very small, we confirm the famous remark of one famous French deputy who said, "Vive la difference!" In fact, even if woman can now perform man's functions, can man claim to be able to perform the role of the woman who alone is capable of bearing babies?

2) As for the Rabbi describing members of a congregation as being non-observant Orthodox, this is obviously a contradiction of terms. How can an Orthodox Rabbi knowingly lead a congregation that is completely or mainly non-observant.

Some people may regard such behaviour as reform through the back door.

Did You Know?

Of the 11 British prime ministers between 1880 and 1940, none wrote an autobiography; of the 11 since 1940, Blair is the only one who hasn't yet written one.

MOSSAD SNATCHES SACRED JEWISH TEXTS FROM SADDAM

Published in *The Sunday Times* 7.5.00

Dozens of sacred Jewish scrolls that Saddam Hussein ordered to be destroyed have been smuggled out of Iraq in an operation masterminded by Mossad, the Israeli secret service.

At least 50 manuscripts containing the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, had lain for decades in a warehouse in Baghdad after being hidden by Iraqi Jews who left for Israel in 1950-51.

Mossad has retrieved 30 of the scrolls after bribing members of the Iraqi army. One of them, thought to have been hand-written 70 years ago, was put on display last week in a synagogue in Afula, northern Israel. Another, 200 years old, has been exhibited in New York.

Many more scrolls, some far older and more valuable, are still in Iraq. "There is a fair chance that we will recover and return them to Jewish hands so that they can be presented in synagogues in Israel and across the world", said one source.

Mossad is believed to have started the operation after its agents in Baghdad learnt of a meeting at which Saddam's generals told him that 50 manuscripts had been found in the city's Battaween district, where the Jewish community used to be concentrated. He is said to have replied: "Burn them".

The news appalled officers at Mossad's headquarters in Tel Aviv, prompting comparisons with Kristallnacht in 1938 when the Nazis burned Jewish shops, synagogues and Torah scrolls in Germany.

Mossad soon learnt that some of Saddam's officers, realising the value of the scrolls, were prepared to defy his orders in return for money. The agency's station in Istanbul, which carries out espionage, against Iraq, was ordered to investigate.

It is not known how much Mossad paid either to the Iraqi officers or to merchants based in Jordan who acted as intermediaries. It may have been as much as £30,000 each.

The rescue of the scrolls appears to have been part of a much larger operation to recover artefacts linked to Iraq's once sizeable Jewish community.

After Iraq declared its independence from British rule in 1932,

Jews held prominent positions in the country; Sasson Heskail, the first minister of finance, was Jewish.

The climate turned hostile after the creation of Israel in 1948. About 121,000 of the 137,000 Jews who lived in Iraq were flown to Israel in 1950-1951. There was a further exodus (in 1970-71 after the Ba'ath came to power and the hanging in Baghdad of 9 innocent Jews), a mere 68 are now left in Baghdad.

Israeli sources said last week that efforts to rescue the remaining Torah scrolls were continuing. "We know where they are. Some of them served the Iraqi Jewish community for hundreds of years," said a source in the Israeli Ministry of Religion.

"We will not leave them in the hands of the Iraqis. The state of Israel, with the help of all its secret and non-secret organisations, will bring the scrolls back home."

Naim Dangoor writes:

In 1957 my late Father managed to export from Baghdad at his own expense no less than 500 scrolls out of a total of over 3,000 that belonged to our community in Iraq. The 500 scrolls were duly received by the Sephardi Federation in London. Many of them were then despatched to various synagogues all over the world but others unfortunately found their way into the hands of dealers and collectors. Baghdad was famous for the quality of Torah scrolls and orders were received from Eretz Yisrael, having to wait sometimes for up to 3 years for completion and delivery.

I am sending you separately a copy of my film "Baklava and the Meaning of Life". In this 23 minute video, sculptor Helene Simon (my mother) shares the recipe for her famous Baklava and treats us to her wisdom and insight on happiness in life.

Helene was born in Baghdad and studied art in London, Egypt, and the United States. After raising a family, she became a sculptor, and her pieces are in a number of museums and important collections. Along the way, she also made some wonderful Baklava.

This video takes a peek into the world of a Jewish artist and mother.

Somerville MA

Jamil Simon

MIDDLE EAST CONFEDERATION CO-OPERATION IS BETTER THAN CONFLICT

by Naim Dangoor

Appeared in "Chronicles" in July 1983

A suggestion was put forward some time ago that the Kurdish problem could perhaps be solved by promoting a federation of present-day Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. This is a wishful dream and unrealistic. Such a federation would upset the balance of power in the region and pose a serious threat to peace. It would be opposed and resisted by Israel and its Arab neighbours alike. The presence of Kurdish minorities in these four countries is not enough reason for uniting them in one entity with one end in Europe and the other end in Central Asia. But a union of a different configuration has a better chance of resolving not only the chronic Kurdish problem, but also other minority problems there, including the Palestinian.

The area covered by Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Arabia is a precise geo-political and historical region, being the cradle of civilisation, the fountain of monotheism, the crossroads of three continents and the home of many ancient national groups. Its fertility and strategic importance made it the prey of foreign invaders throughout history. The Arabs were destined to play a unique role in the historical development of this region. Sheltered in their desert, they were relatively immune from foreign invasions, but were always ready to pounce at the right time on neighbouring territories. Thus, after centuries of warfare between the Byzantine and Persian empires that sapped their energies, the desert Arabs, under the banner of Islam, could defeat both powers. By their ability to subsist in conditions not suitable to their rivals, the Arabs have been able to retain and consolidate their conquests and to fan out into the outlying regions of the Middle East as the general climate became warmer. This process has continued both in peacetime and in the wake of military action. Likewise, by destabilising the region, the Arabs have succeeded in creating a continuous flow of emigration from the Middle East - of Jews, Kurds, Lebanese, Christians, Assyrians, even the more advanced Arabs, who are scattered all over the globe but who would have been invaluable to the development of the region. By the same process a sizeable Israeli diaspora has been mushrooming in Europe, Canada and the U.S.A. Middle Eastern politics and events have to be

viewed and understood in this light. After the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire nothing came out of the self-determination that was promised by the Allies to the various national groups of the Middle East. It is said that the Ottoman "millet" concept, under which a large measure of autonomy was granted to various racial and religious minorities, had to give way to the modern national concept - but this has not succeeded. "Arabs, Jews, Kurds, Seljuk Turks, Persians, Assyrians, Telkaifis, Armenians - how mould such a composite collection of races into a single nation? Sunnis, Shias, Jews, Christians, Sabians, Yezidis - how to lessen the friction between such a variety of creeds?" (The Heart of the Middle East by Richard Coke).

In the end imperial and oil policies favoured treating with the dominant Arabs and everything was handed over to them. There has been an obsession in the world in modern times that democracy means the rule of the majority. Majority rule as an expression of democracy only holds true in a homogeneous society where the differences are over minor issues. In a society divided by race, language, religion or colour, the rights of all groups, large and small, must equally be ensured and protected. This principle would solve Ireland, Africa, Cyprus and the Middle East.

Of course, once in the saddle, the Arabs would not agree to share power with the other groups or allow them any form of self-rule. Hence, the Assyrian massacre of 1933 and the relentless suppression of Kurdish uprisings in their struggle for autonomy. In 1918, a few months after the Balfour declaration, Prince Feisal, later King of Iraq, declared before a large audience at the Albert Hall, "Palestine for the Jews and Arabia for the Arabs."

Subsequently Arab attitudes changed. When the U.N. voted the partition of Palestine in 1947, the Arabs agreed to accept a previous plan of Jewish immigration without a state. When Israel was established, they agreed the partition plan. Since the Six Day War, they have offered to accept the 1967 borders. These are all false promises, for the Arabs cannot in the long run accept situations which go against the grain of pan-Arabic aspiration. Their aim would

always be the elimination of Israel as a foreign body, or cancer as they call it.

After the establishment of Israel, many Palestinian Arabs fled mainly on the advice of Arab governments who wanted them out of the way and were confident to bring them back in triumph. Shortly thereafter, there was an exodus of similar numbers of Jews from Arab countries to Israel and it was widely recognised at the time by the powers and indeed by the Arab governments themselves, who allowed their Jews to leave for Israel, that there was thus a logical and desirable exchange of populations - like many others that took place after the war in Germany, India and other countries. But while Israel absorbed its refugees after many years of hardship in transit camps, the Arabs deliberately left theirs unsettled, although they had all the money to settle them, and kept them as a political weapon and a lever against Israel in their continuing effort to defeat the Jewish state.

The Palestinian refugee problem was created as the direct result of Arab refusal to recognise Jewish political rights in the Middle East. Zionism was the liberation movement of the Jewish people. To the extent that it sought to destroy the State of Israel, the PLO was not a liberation movement, but an arm of Arab imperialism.

The Arabs say that the Palestinian problem must be solved by Israel. The Israelis maintain that it is an Arab problem. In fact, it is a regional problem if only because of the interest taken in it by all the neighbouring countries. This and other problems in the Middle East cannot be solved piecemeal. The solution must be global, for there can be no peace for the Palestinian refugees while the material and political rights of the Jewish refugees are ignored. The solution must be global for there can be no peace in one corner of the Middle East while 20 million Kurds cannot attain autonomy; while the Armenians and Assyrians remember their massacres and their stolen lands; while the Shia majority in Iraq are oppressed; while the Arabs control 5 million square miles of territory and non-Arabs are denied any territory. These are not isolated problems and must be solved together. The

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solution must be global for there can be no peace in the Middle East while a few Arab rulers squander most of the oil wealth and embark on ruinous adventures. The solution must be global, for peace, law and order in the Middle East are indivisible. The Arabs have acted irresponsibly in their attempt to Arabise the whole region. As such they have forfeited the right to lead the Middle East.

The reason why the Arab-Israeli conflict has not come to a decisive conclusion, even after four major wars, is that the two sides have not been playing the same game and it was thus impossible to have a meaningful score. The game that Israel has accepted to play is Russian Roulette or You-Can-Only-Lose-Once. The game of the Arabs is Winner-Takes-All. It is clear from this scenario that neither Israeli victories nor Arab defeats can be conclusive. Only Israel's defeat can be conclusive.

The minorities of the Middle East must realise that they have to co-operate with one another to achieve a just regime in the region; if they don't hang together they will hang separately. In 1976 I sponsored, with the help of the Minority Rights Group, a symposium on Middle East minorities at St Anthony's College, Oxford, which provided a venue for the exchange of views on the problems of the Middle East and their solutions. It might be useful now to undertake a feasibility study and to prepare a blueprint for a federal project.

As a Middle Eastern refugee myself, I watch with dismay the unfolding of events in the Middle East - the destruction, the loss of young lives, the waste of money. The central issue is not the artificial Palestinian problem but Arab refusal to face realities; the trouble is not Zionism but Arab imperialism, not the Nile to the Euphrates accusation levelled at Israel but the dream of the Atlantic to the Gulf, and beyond, of many Arab leaders. As the Arabs face an increasing Iranian threat with increasing concern, they soon must come to realise that their only possible saviour is Israel, which too would not tolerate Iranian penetration of the region. Blind nationalism is not in the best Arab traditions and, in the past, Jews co-operated closely with Arabs in war and peace, especially in the fields of commerce, agriculture and industry. During the golden age of Islam all races had equal access to wealth and power.

The peoples of the Middle East who often suffered together

under foreign domination but were never united in freedom could then organise themselves into a confederation that would seek neither to Arabise, Islamise or Sovietise the Middle East; a confederation that would ensure autonomy, freedom and prosperity to all the people of the region who will be free to live and work everywhere. A regional development board would ensure that the vast wealth of the region is utilised for the benefit of all. Such a grouping would fit well with the neighbouring pattern of Iran, Turkey and Egypt.

The tradition and personality of Abraham, revered in all parts of the Middle East, and who is referred to as the friend of G-d in the Old and New Testaments and the Koran, can be used as a basis to forge the union, with a federal capital named after him.

Sceptics might say that it will take them ages before everyone concerned accepts this arrangement. But once the solution is identified the time element becomes immaterial. There is a local saying that he who follows the right path will eventually reach his destination.

LESSON OF THE EXILE

All the four Rabbis missed the point. The reason why the Jews were exiled to Babylon was to demonstrate that the Middle East was one region and that the peace of the region is individual. In this case the imbalance between the land of the rivers and that of Palestine will always end up in aggression from the Babylonian side. The lesson, therefore, is that Israel must not embark on a revival without pacifying the land of the rivers, Saddam's missile attack on Ramat Gan during the Gulf War is an illustration of this point.

It is said that history repeats itself. Like a good teacher, History will keep repeating itself until the lesson is learnt. The lesson in this case is that Israel must become involved in the politics of Iraq if there is going to be lasting peace for Israel in particular and for the Middle East in general.

Two generations ago the population of Iraq was 3 million, and now it is nearly 30 million without any immigration from outside with a potential of further increase to 40 or 50 million. This and Iraq's wealth in oil and water will eventually put Israel in the shade.

This problem should be the top priority for Israel to tackle.

Some time during the third

century A.D., in one of the two great Jewish academies of Babylonia, four rabbis discussed the question as to why the Holy One, blessed be He, chose Babylonia as the place of exile for the people of Israel. Rabbi Hiyya, himself a native of Babylonia, thought it was because they would not have been able to survive the severe decrees of Rome. Another native of Babylonia, Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedath, sought the explanation topographically - namely that Babylonia was a low-lying land, resembling the nether world, and from such a land the Jews would soon be redeemed. A third sage, Rabbi Hanina bar Hamma, suggested the reason that the language of Babylonia was akin to that of the Torah. The fourth and last of the group, Rabbi Yohanan bar Nappaha, was brief and much more direct: G-d, he said, sent the children of Israel back to their mother's home.

It will be noted that the deliberations of these four worthy sages took place almost exactly eight centuries after Nebuchadnezzar, drove the population of Judah into exile in Babylonia.

**From The Jews of Iraq
by Nissim Rejwan**

BETH HAMEDRASH KNESSET YEHEZKEL

under the leadership of Rabbi Aharon
Bassous

The past fifteen years have seen the Sephardim in London make great strides. New communities have been established, focusing on Torah education, more and more families have come closer to their roots, and an awareness in the wider community of the richness of a religious lifestyle is increasing.

Our aim is now to accelerate this process by providing an all-encompassing place which will be reaching out to all segments of the Sephardi community and actively catering for their needs.

We hope to be able to establish a community, returning the pride of the Sephardim in this country to its former glory.

The Jewish community is witnessing dramatic changes.

There has been a remarkable resurgence in Jewish learning and a sense of renewal in all aspects of Judaism. There is a renewed pride in Jewish

identity in countries where acknowledging one's Jewishness was forbidden for decades. There are thousands of books published in every language. There are schools and education programmes appearing wherever there are Jews to be found.

And yet increasing numbers of people are marrying outside of the religion, and family life and values are being challenged on every level.

This contradiction is perhaps not so surprising, but it should not be witnessed with complacency. There is a need for more outreach and development in those parts of the community which have not benefited from the huge surge in optimism within the religion.

Torah learning and a Jewish way of life is the only way to guarantee continuity.

The experience of the Sephardim in this country might be described as that of the minority within a minority. If it were not difficult enough to sustain a Jewish identity here, it has been still more problematic to sustain the traditions and learning from the oriental countries.

There is a history among the Sephardim of pluralism and tolerance. Differing traditions are sustained and respected. Thankfully, there has been no experience of ideological divisiveness witnessed elsewhere in the Jewish community. And yet there is a less obvious threat to be witnessed, as Sephardim gradually forget those specific customs which make the faith their own. And with that loss, so too there comes a loss of identity.

ASHE LINCOLN

There is a splendid and well-deserved tribute to the late great Captain Ashe Lincoln QC, RNVR, by Abdulla Dangoor in the September 1999 (No. 72) edition of *The Scribe*.

One of many episodes in which Ashe Lincoln was involved during the War was when the Royal Navy captured a German submarine, which was loaded with unexploded torpedoes. Typically, Ashe Lincoln risked his life dismantling them, and he could have been blown to pieces.

Ashe Lincoln was awarded the King's medal for bravery, and was mentioned in Dispatches many times.

Probably the best of Ashe Lincoln's books is "The Odyssey of a

Jewish Sailor", which is one of the most interesting books I have ever seen, and is highly recommended to any readers of *The Scribe* who do not already have it. The splendid photograph in *The Scribe* is also on the front cover of the book.

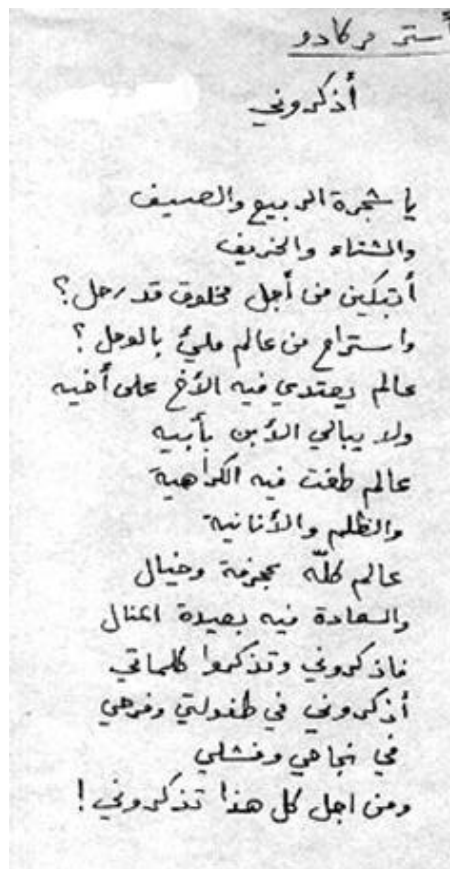
I had the privilege of knowing Ashe Lincoln for many years, and had the pleasure of seeing him regularly at Marble Arch Synagogue, and on Shabbat at the New London Synagogue ("Louis Jacobs' Shul").

London

Lou Gorden

LETTER FROM ESTHER MERCADO (KHABBAZA) DATED 22 MARCH 1999

As I had to undergo a brain tumour operation a few months ago, I will never know what would happen to me. Therefore I wish to offer to you and to my school friends, and all the readers who happen to know me, the following poem in Arabic.



Experience is the mother of wisdom

Out of experience comes wisdom. We learn by our mistakes.

REMEMBERING FOR THE FUTURE 2000

The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide

Last July, a conference was held in London and Oxford to discuss racial genocide outbreaks that have been taking place in various parts of the world since the end of World War II.

The following letter was received from the Executive Chairman of the conference, Dr Elizabeth Maxwell.

To The Exilarch's Foundation

One of the outstanding papers presented at the conference was by Dr Mark Levene, Dept of History, University of Warwick, Coventry. Speaking at a session of the conference, Dr Levene told academics and survivors: "It seems to me to be a paradox. For 50 years no-one was really interested in the Holocaust; now it is everywhere."

Dr Levene questioned the uniqueness of the Holocaust. He considered the invocation, "never again" as hollow and crass.

Dr Levene admitted that the focus on the Holocaust was not necessarily a bad thing, but wondered where do we go from here? How does knowledge of the Holocaust make genocide more difficult? We probably don't have an answer for that yet.

Scribe: The extermination of millions of Jews in the German gas chambers is unique because these Jews died as hostages for the free world. In 1939, Hitler threatened that if world Jewry would embroil Germany in another world war, then all the Jews of Europe would be exterminated. That was the price that the Jews of Europe had to pay, so that people everywhere could live in freedom and peace. Students of the Holocaust are perplexed by its significance because they miss this point. Moreover the Holocaust was aided and abetted by oil interest and by Arab influence in the axis countries which needs to be highlighted.

While "Remembering for the future" and "never again" may be useless in preventing another Jewish Holocaust as there are too few Jews in Europe for that, it may also be useless in preventing smaller outbreaks of genocides elsewhere. But the victims of the Holocaust died for the free world and must be remembered and honoured as such. That is the uniqueness and that is the importance of the Jewish Holocaust.

"BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON:" THE LONGEST DIASPORA

based on an article in *Wizo Review*

The Jewish connection with Babylonia dates from the time of Abraham the Patriarch, who started his journey to the land of Canaan from Ur, just south of the city of Babylon. However, it was only after many centuries, with the exiles from Judea and Samaria in the years 721 and 733 BCE, that a Jewish presence was established in Babylonia. But it was the destruction of the First Temple and Jerusalem in 586 BCE, and the exile of the elite of the nation to Babylon, which created the background for the flowering of Babylonian Jewry.

First Return to Zion

When Babylonia fell to the Persians in 539 BCE, forty-seven years after the destruction and exile, the victor, King Cyrus the Great, was quick to issue a royal directive giving the Jews permission to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Of the 120,000 Jews living in Babylon, 40,000 decided to return to Judea and, eventually, to rebuild the second Temple, but 80,000 decided to remain and prospered there in agriculture and commerce, under the leadership of the Resh Galuta, the Exilarch.

The destruction of the Second Temple (in 70 CE) strengthened the status of the Jews in Babylon, and it became, in fact, the spiritual center of the entire Jewish dispersion. For over a thousand years the Jews of Babylon were represented by the Resh Galuta, the Exilarch (the administrative head of the Jews in exile), and great academies of learning were created in Nehardea, Sura and Pumbedita. Babylon became the center for the creation of great works of Jewish scholarship.

The Talmud

The highly significant contribution of Babylonian Jewry to Jewish life was best expressed and preserved in the compilation of the Babylonian Talmud (Oral Law), the basis for Jewish law (halacha), philosophy and the Jewish way of life - an enormous undertaking began at the Academy of Sura and was completed in the year 499 CE. It has been rightly maintained that no book, with the exception of the Bible,

has played such an essential part in the history of the Jewish people as the Talmud in both its versions, but the Babylonian Talmud is considered superior to the Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud.

Islam Arrives

When the armies of Islam began their triumphant conquest of large portions of what was then the civilized world, Mesopotamia became one of their earliest victories. The Jews of Babylonia welcomed the Moslem conquerors with relief, since the local Persian Sassanian ruler had begun one of their frequent waves of harassment and persecution.

Baghdad and the Period of the Geonim

Baghdad founded in 762 A.D., soon became the capital not only of the Moslem Empire but also of Babylonian Jewish life and scholarship. Shortly after its emergence as a capital and a heavily populated city, Baghdad gradually became the seat, first of the Exilarch, and then of the Geonim, who up till then had resided in the three centres of Jewish learning: Nehardea, Sura and Pumbedita. The Geonim were the spiritual leaders who headed the Babylonian academies.

The two most outstanding and influential Geonim were Sa'adiah ben Joseph Gaon (882-942) and Hai ben Sherira Gaon (939-1038).

Turkish Revival

After centuries of decline, the fortunes of the Jews of Iraq began to improve noticeably during the first decades of the 1800's under the Turkish Ottoman Empire, which ruled the area for almost 400 years, beginning in 1534.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Iraqi Jewish community was noted for its highly developed communal organization. In Baghdad, which had the highest concentration of Jews, there were dozens of institutions including yeshivot, schools, synagogues, charitable organizations, medical institutions and other bodies, designed to meet the needs of the community.

ASPECTS OF BABYLONIAN JEWISH LIFE IN INDIA DURING THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

by Sara Manasseh

Religious and communal life were of foremost importance in India. The early Baghdadian settlers combined keen business acumen with the religious traditions of Baghdad; commercial interests with the study and observance of the Torah. Houses of prayer were established, and in time, beautiful synagogues were erected. David Sassoon built the Maghen Dawid synagogue in Byculla, in 1861, and the Ohel Dawid Synagogue, a famous landmark in Poona, in 1863. Later, his grandson, Sir Jacob Sassoon built the Kenesseth Eliahoo Synagogue in the Bombay Fort area in 1884. In the same year, in Calcutta, the Ezra family built the Maghen Dawid synagogue, a magnificent structure and the largest synagogue in the East. The Ezra family had also previously built synagogues in Calcutta, including the Beth El (c. 1861). In 1893, Hakham Shlomo Abid Twena from Baghdad went to Calcutta, and in time set up a prayer hall in his own home; he is remembered for his profound knowledge of Jewish Law and for his inspiring sermons, delivered in Arabic.

Philanthropic work by the Sassoon family included the Sassoon General Hospital in Poona, and in Bombay, the **Jacob Sassoon High School** and the **Sassoon Mechanics Institute**, later renamed the **David Sassoon Library and Reading Room**. In 1994, in recognition of the charitable works of David Sassoon, the road leading from the Library to the Law Courts, was renamed "**David Sassoon Marg**" (David Sassoon Way). In Calcutta, the Jewish Girls School achieved special distinction under Miss Rahma Luddy, who had trained in England, and who was appointed headmistress in 1929.

In Bombay, the Jewish Women's League was founded during the 20th century to assist needy families. Mrs Hannah Gourgey was one of the early members. The league made major headway with the coming of Mrs Georgette Ani (my grandmother). Not content with attending to letters of application for assistance at the committee's meetings, she would visit the poorest families with one or two other ladies, and talk to them in the Jewish Baghdadian Arabic dialect - the common

lingua franca. Visiting the Sir Jacob Sassoon High School it was found that the School Feeding Fund was totally inadequate to meet the rapidly rising costs in the World War 2 years. Sir Victor Sassoon was approached, and with the assistance of the E. D. Sassoon funds, a good daily hot lunch was organised for the whole school. With the coming of the refugees from Singapore, the Jewish Women's League organised the refugee centre at Dharbanga Mansions (in Malabar Hill; provided by the government of Bombay), and assisted the families to get settled. The League also played its part in equipping children who went on Youth Aliyah groups to Israel.

Wizo (Women's International Zionist Organisation) was founded in Bombay after the arrival of European Jews before and during World War 2, for raising funds for Israel. The Jewish Relief Association was set up by European immigrants to assist members of this community who had come to Bombay as refugees from Nazi persecution.

Relations with Israel

The Bombay Zionist Association was founded in 1920 by three young Baghdadians: Judah Gubby, Joseph S Ezra and Ezekiel S Somekh, inspired by newspaper reports of events in London to celebrate the Balfour Declaration, 1917.

The Central Jewish Board of Bombay was founded in 1943, with representatives from the synagogues, initially to deal with anti-Zionist or anti-Jewish attacks in the press. It was succeeded by the Council of Indian Jewry founded 1978.

Jewish publications included the Jewish Advocate and the Jewish Tribune, and in later years, The Indo-Israel Review. The BZA arranged lectures and fundraising for the national institutions in Palestine, and then Israel, and initially, 'Aliyah (immigration) to Israel. From 1948-1958 Mr F W Pollack personally published and edited a monthly magazine, India and Israel, which was highly regarded.

Youth organizations

In 1935, **Habonim** (retained as a religious organization in India, unlike its development elsewhere) was founded in Bombay by H"R Albert Manasseh, with the assistance of Mr Solomon Ezra. The movement grew, and continued always as

a religious organization. Centers were opened in **Calcutta** with the support of Sir David and Lady Rachel Ezra, and the leadership of Sally Meyer (now Dr Sally Lewis); in Cochin, led by Mr Koder and in Poona. A number of the members later made 'Aliyah' to Israel. Habonim initiated the first Youth Aliyah groups from Bombay to Kibbutz Lavee and other religious centers.

Bnei Akiva was founded by the Jewish Agency who sent shlichim (emissaries) from Israel to organize the work.

Maccabi, founded in Bombay by Mr Starosta, a European immigrant, with Sass Moses, as Chairman, captured the interest of the youth, and contingents were sent to Israel to take part in the Maccabiah competitions.

In Bombay, for 50 years, Albert Manasseh (1907-1991) was the Chairman and Life President of the Sassoon Trusts - which included the three synagogues - of which he was the spiritual head, schools and burial ground. He devoted much attention to youth in school, Bnei Akiva and Habonim. He accompanied the first Youth Aliyah group to Israel from India to ensure that they were settled in religious Youth Aliyah centers. In recognition of his dedication and guidance the trustees of the EEE Sassoon school recently opened (c.1993) the **Albert Manasseh Memorial Nursery School**.

from "*The Jewish Babylonian*", the Newsletter of Midrash BEN ISH HAI

To: H E Mr Zvi Gabay
Israeli Ambassador Dublin

20 April 1999

AN IRAQI IN IRELAND

Your Excellency,

Greetings and salutations. This is but an introductory letter and message of peace. I am Iraqi by birth and have been an Irish national since 1986. I left Iraq in 1976 and have not been back since. My paternal grandfather *Senator Mohammed Al-Sadr* was one of Iraq's 1920 uprising leaders, a hero of independence, an ecumenist, a political and religious figure and one of the fathers of the Iraqi state. It is because of this family background that I was brought up

to know about and respect all the constituent groups that constituted the people of Iraq. Alas, the violent Iraq of Saddam I grew up in (post 1958) had very few Iraqi Jews, but both my late parents spoke fondly of them. I yearned to hear the Iraqi Jewish dialect.

I am an avid visitor of the Internet and visited the *Babylon Jewry Heritage Centre* site. I also received their newsletter *Nahardea*. I was amazed to see so many names I recognised from what my parents had told me. I signed the guest book and subsequently received an e-mail from a Ms Helen Bekhor in Australia. She is of Iraqi Jewish origin and her husband Ken is an Iraqi Jew. She told me that your kind self is an Iraqi Jew and that is why I decided to write to you both to introduce myself and to offer you greetings. Helen and Ken Bekhor also asked me to convey their regards (they told me to remind you that you had lunch with them, many many years ago when you were stationed in Sydney).

I pray that our peoples find peace in our time and that we all can hear the Iraqi Jewish dialect spoken again in the land of Babylon, in a free, democratic and pluralist Iraq. Please honour me by visiting my website at <http://www.geocities.com/BourbonStreet/Quarter/1803> and feel free to e-mail me any time.

Shalom / Salam
Mohammed H Al-Sadr **Dublin**

6 May 1999

Dear Dr Al-Sadr

Thank you very much for your letter and the sentiment it contained. I am following with much anxiety the situation in Iraq and only hope that peace will prevail in that country for its people and the future generation in the Middle East.

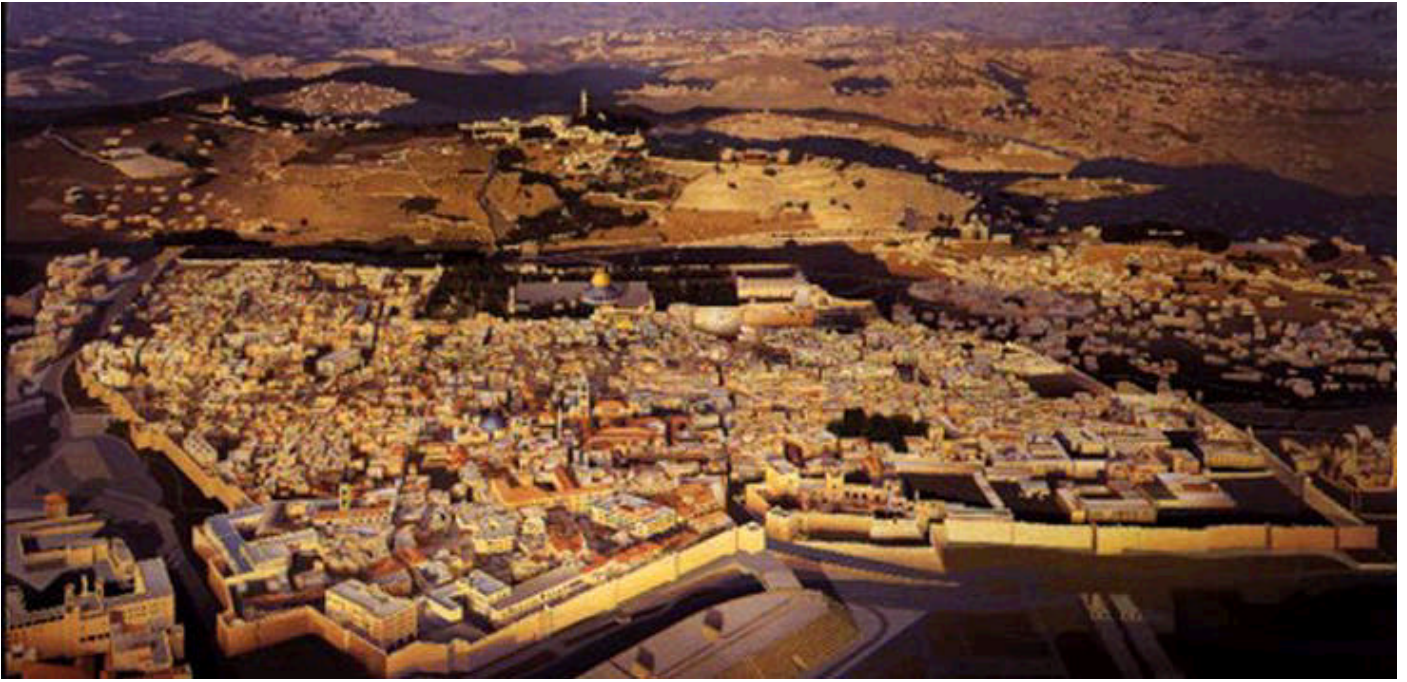
I enclose a copy of *The Scribe*, a Journal of Babylonian Jewry published in London and trust it will be of interest to you.

Yours sincerely
Zvi Gabay **Dublin**

Courtesy costs nothing

There is nothing to be lost by behaving in a courteous way. Sometimes 'civility' or 'politeness' is used instead of 'courtesy'.

JERUSALEM, THE ETERNAL CITY



In 1996 the Khalili Family Trust commissioned the ultimate painting of the City of Jerusalem to be painted with the hope that in the new Millennium it will be possible for Jews, Christians and Muslims to live together in Peace and Harmony.

The painting shown below was first exhibited in the "Summer Exhibition" in the Royal Academy of Art London from 29 May 2000 to 7 August 2000 and subsequently will travel to the Tower of David in Jerusalem. Upon the attainment of permanent Peace in the Middle East it will travel throughout all the major Muslim countries in the world and hopefully will become a shining torch of the three faiths.

I have pleasure in enclosing a copy (shown above) of the postcard which we have produced which I hope you will find interesting.

London

Dr N D Khalili

THE FUTURE OF JERUSALEM

"Yasser Arafat feels he must consult with hundreds of millions of Muslims, before he can make any decisions with respect to Jerusalem; well Jerusalem is also the concern of all world Jewry", asserted Ambassador Dore Gold, Israel's former UN ambassador, who spoke at a Friends of Yesha meeting at the Hendon United Synagogue. Gold, who also met with the Board of Deputies carried a message that the involvement of the International community in the issue of Jerusalem is likely to increase in the months ahead: Up until now the world assumed that Israel's insistence on a unified Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty was carved in stone. The perception emanating from Camp David is that the Jewish position is more pliable; this will now invite pressure on Israel in the future. This must be revised - the national consensus in Israel opposes concessions in Jerusalem. For Russian Jews, for example, the liberation of Jerusalem in

1967 began a re-birth that led to the movement to free Soviet Jewry. At Camp David President Clinton proposed that Israel turn over two quarters of the Old City to Palestinian sovereignty. Prime Minister Barak did not reject this proposal but only asked Clinton to check with Arafat. Whatever Barak said at Camp David was oral, was stated to a third party (the US) and was hypothetical (dependent on achieving Palestinian agreement on all other issues). It cannot constitute a binding international commitment for future Israeli governments. A major world-wide information campaign is needed on Jewish rights in Jerusalem after Camp David. Gold now heads the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs. His writing on Jerusalem can be viewed on the centre's website: www.jcpa.org

The Zionist Standard

DOME OF THE ROCK Temple-Mount Mosque 'Temporary'

JERUSALEM, 15 Kislev - After a 3 1/2 hour discussion between a Jewish delegation and representatives of the Moslem government last night, the Moslems gave assurances that the mosque under construction on the Temple Mount is only in the way of a temporary structure.

The delegation had requested the interview after construction on the mosque had begun despite explicit promises by the authorities that, because of the Jews' unhelpfulness in the uncovering of the Foundation Stone, the holiness of the spot on which once stood the Temple would be carefully safeguarded.

The Caliph's representatives, on the other hand, argued that the Jews had been granted many privileges, and that it was "not too much to ask" that the Moslems be given the opportunity to erect a "temporary mosque" on the spot where, according to Moslem tradition, Mohammed tied us his horse - a spot